

The Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology's Statement on Ainu Research

April 1, 2024

In June 1989, the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (JASCA, formerly known as the Japanese Society of Ethnology), announced to society at large its "Statement on Ainu Studies by the Ethics Committee of the Japanese Society of Ethnology" (hereafter "the 1989 Statement"). The purpose of the 1989 Statement was to examine the past activities of cultural anthropologists, and to look toward the possible future of research with the Ainu people.

As a form of academic knowledge established in the 19th century, cultural anthropology has been closely associated with the racism, imperialism, and colonialism of its time. This continued until, at the latest, the mid-20th century. The 1989 Statement was based on a deep reflection of the fact that under this influence, and since the establishment of "Hokkaido" in 1869, research on the Ainu people had long lacked an orientation that reflected the subjective will of the Ainu people and the demands of society. It also lacked a will to share the results of research with the cultural participants concerned. In addition, the 1989 Statement also called for a future of research based on sufficient communication with the Ainu people, the fostering of researchers of Ainu descent, and the need to facilitate educational curricula to eradicate prejudice and discrimination in Japanese society.

Taking the 1989 Statement to heart, individual JASCA members have since attempted to conduct research in collaboration with Ainu people. In 1996, the JASCA Board of Directors submitted a letter to the Chief Cabinet Secretary of the Japanese government and, in 2008, the President of JASCA submitted a letter to the House Members Group for Considering the Establishment of the Rights of the Ainu People declaring that JASCA would maintain the views expressed in the 1989 Statement.

However, there were still many points that demanded reflection that remained unaddressed. These include, the fact that the policy of sharing the results of cultural anthropological research was designated solely as a matter of individual effort by members of the Society, the fact that, as an academic society, we have not adopted an attitude of deep understanding and support for the specific

will and demands of Ainu people that have been directed toward the majority of Japanese society, and the fact that we have failed to recognize that the psychological trauma caused by past Ainu research will not disappear with the passage of time. It is truly regrettable that the spirit of the 1989 Statement, which was supposed to take into account the dignity of the Ainu as a people, and as human beings, was not fully realized in JASCA's subsequent academic activities, and that even today the Society is sometimes mistrusted by the Ainu people and its activities misunderstood as the result of indifference to the mistakes of the past.

In the more than three decades since 1989, the international community's perception of the value of the principle of respect for the diversity of the life backgrounds of all people, regardless of descent, gender, or social class, has undergone a profound transformation. The mistakes made in the past by an attitude of the overall supremacy of research can never be undone, but we are convinced that unless we properly recognize this past and constantly reflect upon it, there will be no future for academic research, especially cultural anthropology, which deals with the lives of living people. With a determination to deepen mutual understanding among human beings, and with a fair awareness of the social problems faced by Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities living in today's world, as well as various issues related to injustice on a global scale, we, the members of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, acknowledge, and apologize for our past research orientation toward the Ainu people. We sincerely hope that this statement will serve as an expression of our responsibility towards the future, and that it will lead to renewed communication with the Ainu people both within and outside of our Society.

The Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology